



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Mount Rushmore
National Memorial

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Mount Rushmore National Memorial News Release

Mount Rushmore to Develop Action Plan to Manage Pine Beetle Infestation

(Keystone, SD) The National Park Service has assembled a team of managers and specialists to develop an action plan for summer 2010, relating to the treatment of the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. The team is comprised of National Park Service employees from Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the Northern Great Plains Fire Management Program, and the Midwest Regional Office which provides oversight and technical guidance to the Memorial.

For decades, the Black Hills have been experiencing outbreaks of the mountain pine beetle which currently are killing large swaths of forests on private and public lands. The National Park Service has been working with Black Hills partners and developing strategies on how to slow the spread of the infestation by working with the USDA Forest Service, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, and various local government agencies.


The team will convene today at Mount Rushmore to strategize on the development of an action plan. The plan will most likely include a three prong approach and will focus on prevention, elimination of existing infestations, and a post-treatment clean-up component.

The Black Hills area has experienced severe drought conditions for several years now, allowing the mountain pine beetle to proliferate, infecting more and more trees. Mount Rushmore National Memorial is surrounded by the Black Hills National Forest and abuts the Black Elk Wilderness area. As of 2009, 100% of the total acreage of the Black Elk Wilderness has been affected by tree mortality due to bark beetle infestation. The nearby Norbeck Wildlife Preserve is also adversely impacted, with an anticipated mortality rate of 80% for its mature timber stands.

Populations of the mountain pine beetle are typically found at an endemic level, killing and reproducing in stressed or weakened trees. At times, beetle populations increase dramatically. In the increasing and outbreak stages, any host trees, healthy or stressed, are attacked and killed.

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Mountain pine beetle has always been a part of the Black Hills forest ecosystem, with outbreaks occurring periodically. The first recorded outbreak in the Hills occurred from the late 1890's through the early 1900's and killed an estimated 1-2 billion board feet of timber. Outbreaks also have occurred in the 1930's, 1940's, 1960's and 1970's, each lasting 8-13 years with the 1970's outbreak being larger and causing more mortality than any of the others, except for the turn of the century outbreak.

The standing dead timber with many trees still retaining their dried out needles, combined with the drought conditions, significantly increases the potential for a catastrophic wildfire to rapidly spread throughout the area. Just like the mountain pine beetle, wildfire does not recognize political boundaries and can affect public and private lands without discrimination.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial has successfully completed several fuel-reduction projects in the past several years in an attempt to provide a means to stop or slow the growth of any unwanted wildfire. These projects have included thinning, through prescribed fire or mechanical removal, overcrowded stands of timber near critical structures and areas within the memorial.

The goal of this planning team is to develop a plan for action to slow the spread of mountain pine beetle and protect the Mount Rushmore area from large wildfires.

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